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SUBJECT: PASTORALISTS HIGHLIGHT INEFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT CONCERNS

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Deputy Pol/Econ Chief and USAID/Ethiopia Senior Policy Advisor (EmbOffs) attended a UNOCHA-coordinated pastoralist conference in Hudet, Liben Zone, Somali Region, Ethiopia November 28-December 3. Pastoralists from throughout the Horn of Africa convened in plenary and focus groups to address common concerns and challenges. The gathering focused primarily on conflict and conflict resolution in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, but also addressed other challenges such as the loss of influence and power of traditional authorities to formal governments, and the inability of formal government structures to provide services and peace. End Summary.

12. (U) Several hundred pastoralist elders from Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti -- including representatives from all but one of Somalia's 52 districts -- convened for this conference. Minister Bashir Ali, Chairman of the Pastoralist Subcommittee in the Ethiopian parliament, together with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the zonal and district administrations, represented the Ethiopian government. International observers were invited for the last two days of the meeting, which was extended for an additional day at the last minute. Local and international non-governmental organizations, including Save the Children (US), Save the Children (UK), Pastoralist Concern Association of Ethiopia (PCAE), and Save the Rural Society (SRS) observed the proceedings.

PEACE AND SECURITY CONCERNS

13. (SBU) Discontent at the overall situation in the Somali Region marked the tone of the gathering, although, by common consent, the elders did not generally address the current political situation in Somalia or in Ethiopia's Ogaden region in plenary sessions. Generally, in plenary, the pastoralists identified 1) conflict over grazing land and water resources, exacerbated by enclosures of land for agriculture, and 2) bad governance as the primary drivers of conflict in the Somali Region. With respect to governance, complaints seemed largely to focus on the loss of influence and power of traditional authorities within formal governments, and the inability of formal government structures to provide services and peace. Elders blamed this authority vacuum, as well as discontent over the lack of effective government -- either "modern" or "traditional" -- for clan and ethnic conflict and general lawlessness.

14. (SBU) The pastoralists did, however, conclude that the Somali people themselves have to stop inter-clan conflict and unite with other pastoralists to press their interests to formal government entities. Pastoralist infighting has prevented them from presenting

a united front. Considerable discussion centered on the need for traditional authorities to be re-empowered, especially to be given responsibility for conflict resolution and delivery of social programs.

#### SIDEBAR DISCUSSIONS ON CONFLICT

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15. (SBU) In addition to the plenary sessions, a number of sidebars were held between clans to attempt to resolve longstanding disputes. While no specific agreements were announced, some communities did resolve to continue their dialogue upon their return to their home regions. Notably, the Afari delegation complained about the aggression of the Issa Somalis, appealing to the wider Somali community to restrain Issa encroachment on Afar lands. Several evening meetings were devoted to this issue and Afar and Issa elders agreed to continue to discuss, at a future date, a way forward.

16. (SBU) While largely avoided in plenary, Somalia and the Ogaden dominated many of the sidebar discussions. U.S. observers were able to meet with a number of elders from the Ogaden and other areas. When they felt safe to do so, they complained of Ethiopian government abuses in the Ogaden. Recounting events dated from the beginning of 2007 to the past few months, they detailed a number of human rights abuses that will be recorded septel.

#### LIVELIHOOD CONCERNS

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17. (U) In addition to conflict resolution, the pastoralists identified a number of other concerns facing pastoralists in the Somali Region. These include: 1) pastoralists' wealth is not adequately recognized or appreciated by other segments of society;

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2) the market for pastoralists' trade (i.e. animal trade) is nontransparent and dominated by middlemen - so pastoralists do not receive fair value for their livestock; 3) land enclosures (primarily for farming) are disrupting traditional migratory practices - dry and wet season areas should be identified and reserved for pastoralists; 4) land degradation (particularly deforestation for charcoal) has harmed grazing lands and must be addressed; 5) social services are inadequate in pastoralist lands (for example, Warder zone has no bank and no livestock market, forcing people to go Somalia - only to be accused by Ethiopian authorities of engaging in illicit trade); and 6) wildlife has been destroyed.

#### OUTCOMES/CONCLUSIONS

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18. (U) Full results of the meeting were being recorded in Somali by Somali journalists, and will be published in Somali and English in the coming weeks.

Ethiopia's Somali region pastoralists voted to form a pastoralist association to protect and advocate on behalf of pastoralist interests in the Somali region. The details of the association were being hammered out as of the afternoon of December 2, but broadly participation in the association is to be voluntary and uncompensated. The members agreed to have a steering committee consisting of 1) two representatives from each Somali region woreda; 2) one woman from each of the nine Somali region zones; and 3) two technical experts. Membership on the steering committee was to be restricted to persons present at the conference, but subject to modification at a later date. The Sultan urged the pastoralists to put aside clan/sub-clan differences and select representatives who had the interests of the broader pastoralist community at heart.

19. (U) A number of Ethiopian government officials addressed the gathering during procedural discussions on the proposed association. Generally, they seemed to support the initiative but it is unclear toward what end. Representatives included a number of Members of Parliament, including the Chair of the Parliamentary Pastoralist Committee, Behir Ali (Jijiga), and medium to low level officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Federal Affairs.

